

Having clarified the seventh commandment from the pharisaical misinterpretation in vv27-28, our Savior now suggests a radical response—thus the connection between vv29-30 to vv27-28 I trust is obvious—having shown the true intent of the commandment—“you shall not commit adultery”—our Savior assumes it will find adultery in His hearers—thus He now provides the appropriate response to the exceedingly broad nature of the commandment...

But before we come to our text let me first clarify as to what our Savior is not teaching—[1] He is not teaching salvation by works—when our Savior says—“it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell”—He is not teaching that our mortification in anyway merits or earns our salvation—this would contradict the entire Bible—but He is teaching—that a person who fails to mortify their sins is a stranger to grace and in the end will be cast into hell...

Notice [2] He is not teaching mutilation—that is—He is not telling us to literally pluck out our eyes and cut off our hands—but He is describing the radical nature of mortification that’s similar to plucking out eyes and cutting off hands—Hendriksen summarizes our Lord’s meaning—“Take drastic action in getting rid of whatever in the natural course of events will tempt you into sin...”

- I. Mortification: Its Meaning
- II. Mortification: Its Motive
- III. Mortification: Its Means

I. Mortification: Its Meaning

1. The term “mortification” refers to the act of a Christian wherein the remaining principle of sin is weakened, resisted, and slain...
2. To put it simply—it’s the slaying or killing of sin, Col.3:5—“put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry...”
3. Thus there are at least two aspects to mortification—[1] that we repent from all present sin, and [2] that we prevent all potential sin...
4. Notice [1] we must repent from all present sin—that is—we have to identify all known sin and stop doing it...
5. Sometimes I think we make things more complicated then they are—if you or I am doing anything that we know is wrong—we must stop it...
6. Eph.4:28—“he who is stealing must stop stealing...”—are you stealing?—then stop it—are you doing any known sin?—then stop it...
7. Yes—stop it for the right reasons—and yes—replace it with right behavior—but—stop it—kill it—put it away from you...
8. And frankly—I believe this is the problem with some of us [dare I say many of us]—we know what we’re doing is wrong—but we simply don’t stop it...
9. And what we do is justify it by complicating the matter—I just can’t stop doing—that’s too easy—that’s too simple...
10. But my brethren for many of us, our problem is not knowing what we should do—but doing it—yes, do it by grace and for His glory—but do it...
11. Notice [2] we must prevent all potential sin—that is, we must starve the flesh from all that might excite it or tempt it to sin...
12. Rom.13:13-14—“let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts...”
13. Here the apostle exhorts us to “walk properly, as in the day”—that is—in the bright light of holiness and purity—“not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy...”

14. Notice he provides a twofold way to do this—[a] put on the Lord Jesus Christ—that is—cultivate the positive character traits found in Christ...
15. Col.3:12—“therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, etc...”
16. Notice [b] make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts—that is—go nowhere and do nothing that might excite the flesh...
17. The Greek word translated “provision” literally means “forethought or foresight”—it refers to making plans for a future event...
18. We find the same word in 1Tim.5:8—“but if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever...”
19. Here the apostle says that any man who refuses to think ahead in order to make provision for his own, he has denied the very essence of practical religion...
20. Thus it carries with it the idea of making future provision—for example—let’s say you were planning to be out of town for a day...
21. You might look ahead and make provisions for your dog—you might fill up an extra bowl of food and water...
22. Thus the apostle is exhorting us not to plan ahead with reference to the flesh, not to set up any future provisions for it—“to fulfill the lusts thereof...”
23. Thus essential to the practice of mortification is the repenting of all present sin, and the preventing of all potential sin...
24. But before I leave this point I want to suggest two things from the imagery our text with regards to the manner of our mortification...
25. Notice [1] it is to be radical—what can be more radical than plucking out right eyes and cutting off right hands...
26. Martyn Lloyd-Jones—“He is saying that, however valuable a thing may be to you in and of itself, if it is going to trap you and cause you to stumble, get rid of it, throw it away...”
27. Notice [2] it is to be thorough—here I refer to the phrase—“and cast it from you...”—our Savior does not say we’re to pluck out eyes and cut off hands only to hide them under our beds...
28. Practically speaking this means—we take any cause of stumbling within our houses, that doesn’t have to be there, to the dump...
29. It means we break off any relationship that doesn’t have to exist that proves a repeated cause of offense or stumbling...
30. It means we refuse to go to any place that we absolutely don’t have to go, that’s proven a means of stumbling in the past...

II. Mortification: Its Motive

1. While the Scriptures provide many motives for mortification, our Savior provides one that’s often overlooked or even denied by many professing Christians...
2. It’s found twice in the words—“cast into hell...”—in other words—the only alternative to mortifying sin is being overtaken by it in eternal hell...
3. This is to say—any person—regardless what they profess—if they live in open [or secrete] indulgence of sin—will never go to heaven...
4. Thus what our Savior is saying is this—there are two paths—one broad and one narrow—the broad road leads to destruction the narrow to eternal life...
5. The narrow way that leads to life is one marked by mortification of sin—a path characterized by fighting and resisting the flesh...
6. In contrast to this—the broad road is one of indulgence and ease—no fighting—no mortifying—but only satisfying the lusts of the flesh...
7. In other words—what our Savior does is this—He sets out the only two possible paths—one is a way of mortification and the other of destruction...
8. The clear implication is that we are all on one of these paths—either we are putting to death sin or sin will put us to death in hell...

9. Matt.16:24-25—“then Jesus said to His disciples, If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it...”
10. Our Savior describes the way to eternal life as a way of mortification—daily carrying our cross or dying or denying self...
11. Rom.8:12-14—“therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live...”
12. Here the apostle sets before us two ways—one leads to death and the other to life—one is characterized by fleshly satisfaction and the other mortification...
13. 1Cor.9:26-27—“therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified...”
14. The phrase “I discipline my body and bring it into subjection” more literally means—“I beat my body and make it my slave...”
15. It refers to the vigorous manner he dealt with the body of sin—the remaining principle of sin called the flesh...
16. Notice the only other option to such buffeting or beating—“lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified [literally—not passing the test, unapproved or rebobate]...”
17. Again we find two possible paths—one is described as running a difficult race which includes fighting, the other as being disqualified...
18. Gal.6:7-8—“do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life...”
19. Here we find the same truth—those who sow to the flesh will reap eternal corruption and those who sow to the Spirit to everlasting life...
20. Thus mortification is not the basis of our salvation—but mortification characterizes the narrow way that leads to life...
21. Let me illustrate—let’s say there was an American soldier in the Second World War, who was found out to be a Nazi spy—and in the end was put to death...
22. Well in a similar way, any person who claims to be a Christian yet has never declared war against sin—is not a true Christian and in the end will be put to death...
23. Thus our Savior sets out two ways before us—one is characterized by killing the flesh which leads to life, the other by indulging the flesh which leads to death...
24. Now at this point I want to suggest two reasons why—why our Savior sets before His readers the reality of hell as the only alternative to mortification...
25. Notice [1] to distinguish His true followers from the false—its probable that He still has in mind the scribes and Pharisees...
26. Beginning with v20 our Savior has been describing how the righteousness of His kingdom surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees...
27. We learn in v21 and v27 that this was largely external—that it neglected the heart duties of mortification of inner or heart sins...
28. Thus our Savior makes very plan—that those who live with little or no concern for the condition of their hearts are not true disciples and will end in the lack of fire...
29. Notice [2] to encourage His true followers in their duty—throughout the Scriptures we are constantly exhorted to persevere...
30. In order to encourage us to persevere, various motives are enlisted—the dying love of Christ, the joys of heaven, and the reality of eternal hell...

III. Mortification: Its Means

It must be admitted that our Savior here tells us to pluck out eyes and cut off hands without telling us how—but as we consider the clear teaching of Scripture, I suggest three things are indispensable to the Christian’s responsibility of mortification...

A. God’s Spirit

1. I trust this is the obvious place to begin—nobody is able or willing to mortify one single sin outside of the inner workings of the Holy Spirit of God...
2. Rom.8:12-14—“therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live...”
3. How are we enabled to put to death the deeds of the body—but “through” or “by” the presence of the Spirit...
4. Notice byway of clarification that Paul is careful not to say that the Spirit mortifies our sins for us—“but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body...”
5. In other words—we are not passive in the process—but are expected to lay hold of the Spirit’s assistance in mortifying our sins...
6. We find the same truth stated differently in Gal.5:16-17—“walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish....”
7. To walk “in” or “by the Spirit” is the opposite of walking according to the flesh—it’s to walk or live in harmony to God’s word...
8. But to be more specific, to walk in or by the Spirit at least entails two things—[1] that we walk dependent upon His power...
9. By this I mean we live painfully aware of our utter dependence upon His enabling and empowering work—that without Him we can do nothing...
10. V17—“for the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish...”
11. The Spirit enables us to fight against the flesh—and without His enabling power we will lose every single time...
12. Let me put it this way—you and I, are no match for the flesh—it is too powerful a foe to defeat in and by our own strength...
13. Notice [2] that we walk conscious of His presence—by this I mean we act in such a way so as not to grieve Him...

B. God’s word

1. This point is closely related to the previous—as the Spirit works in and by the word, Eph.6:17—“and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God...”
2. Notice [1] regularly expose your soul to the whole of Scripture—I refer to this as a general preventative or precaution...
3. Regular or daily exposure to the word of God serves as a preventive—expose yourselves to the whole of Scripture threats as well as promises...
4. Ps.119:9—“how can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word...”—and how does one live according to His word but by being regularly exposed to it...
5. Notice [2] specifically apply relevant texts to individual sins—memorize and meditate upon a specific text that fights against a specific sin or temptation...

C. God’s grace

1. Let me briefly suggest three things about grace as a means for our mortification—[1] there is grace to motivate us...

2. Notice [2] there is grace to strengthen us, 2Cor.12:9—“my grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness...”
3. Notice [3] there is grace to forgive us, 1Jn.1:9—“if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness...”